

Using Adobe Acrobat Reader to Sign PDFs

How a self-signed Digital signature works in Acrobat

A digital signature, like a conventional handwritten signature, identifies the person signing a document. Unlike a handwritten signature, a digital signature is difficult to forge because it contains encrypted information that is unique to the signer and easily verified.

Most digital signatures are referred to as approval signatures. Signatures that certify a PDF are called certifying signatures. Only the first person to sign a PDF (most often, the author) can add a certifying signature. A certifying signature attests to the contents of the document and allows the signer to specify the types of changes allowed for the document to remain certified. Changes to the document are detected in the Signatures panel.

To sign a document, you must obtain a digital ID or create a self-signed digital ID in Reader. The digital ID contains a private key that is used to add the digital signature, and it contains a certificate that you share with those who need to validate your signature.

When you apply a digital signature, Reader uses a hashing algorithm to generate a message digest, which it encrypts using your private key. Reader embeds the encrypted message digest in the PDF, along with details from your certificate, a visual representation of your signature, and a version of the document at the time it was signed.

Creating a Self-signed Digital Signature

Use this procedure to create a digital signature for use with Adobe Acrobat Reader. You will only need to do this once; subsequent use of your signature only requires you to select the Place Signature option and enter the password you create here.

1. Ensure you are running the most recent version of Acrobat Reader- at least version 8.1. You can download the most recent version of Acrobat Reader at <http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readstep2.html>.
2. Select the **Security Settings** option on the Documents menu.
3. Click **Digital IDs** on the left window.
4. Click the **Add Digital ID** button.
5. Select the **Create a self-signed digital ID for use with Acrobat** option.
6. Click the **Next** button.
7. Select the **PKCS#12 Digital ID** type option.

8. Type your name, organization, and email address in the appropriate fields. This information will appear as part of your digital signature.
9. Select the **1024-bit encryption** option. This is the more universally compatible option.
10. Click the **Next** button.
11. Specify a desired location for your digital signature file, if different than the default.
12. Type a password for your signature. This password must be at least 6 characters long, is case-sensitive, and cannot contain double quotation marks (") or ! @ # \$ % ^ & * , | \ ; < > _.
13. Type your password again in the Confirm Password field.
14. Click the **Finish** button. You have now created a digital signature that can be used in Acrobat for signing documents.

Applying your signature to a PDF document

Use this procedure to sign a document in Adobe Reader. This option will only be available if the PDF creator has set the appropriate fields and permissions within the PDF file. If a document will have a combination of electronic and conventional hand signatures on it, all electronic signatures must be completed first.

1. Ensure you are running the most recent version of Acrobat Reader- at least version 8.1. You can download the most recent version of Acrobat Reader at <http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readstep2.html>.
2. Create a self-signed digital signature in Acrobat Reader, if you haven't already.
3. Open the document you wish to sign.
4. Review the document text. When you are satisfied with the content, locate the appropriate signature field.
5. Click the signature flag.
6. When prompted, enter the password for your signature.
7. Save the file with your initials at the end of the file name, all lowercase and in parentheses; for example, ABCv1p2_Site_endorsement(abc).pdf.
8. If other signatures are required, forward your signed copy of the document to them.